
Distinction Awards: the system in England and Wales

There has been increased publicity about Distinction Awards following the Report of the Working Party on the Review of the Consultants' Distinction Award Scheme (Chaired by Dr Robert Kendell) published in October 1994.

The following note attempts to clarify the current position. However, the Minister of Health has determined that the current arrangements should be retained for one more year only and therefore further information will be published in due course.

The College has always considered that the Distinction Awards system should be fair and open. Any College member who is eligible for an Award and believes that he or she has been overlooked for any reason should contact their Regional Adviser for Distinction Awards (see list below) or the President. It should be noted that these Advisers have quite separate responsibilities from the College's Regional Advisers for Postgraduate Education.

Criteria for Awards

There are no formal criteria for awards, but general guidelines are set out in the Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards (ACDA) 1994. Every Trust is provided with a copy and this can be consulted by members. These state that to warrant consideration for an award, the various awards committees look for performance over and above what is normally expected in respect of service to patients, teaching and the management and development of the service. Principally, they will be looking for the following qualities.

Clinical (or paraclinical) excellence and recognition of leadership.

Research, innovation and improvement in the service. The expectations may vary for the three contract groups – regional, teaching and honorary – and will relate to their differing opportunities.

Outstanding administrative or management effort, which will again be related to opportunity and normal expectations. For example, there will be exceptions for honorary NHS contract holders (e.g. academics and research workers staff) whose duties include a smaller NHS management content.

Teaching and training; for example, special effort to train junior staff, or take an active part in undergraduate or postgraduate teaching, especially if undertaken in addition to ordinary duties.

Apart from any distinction or academic merit, hard work and outstanding service to the NHS may alone be sufficient for recognition. Consultants who succeed in doing good work in posts that have inadequate supporting staff and poor facilities are often highly meritorious. This is commonly referred to as "having borne the heat and burden of the day". This criterion would not normally apply above B award level.

For the small number of awards available at A and A+ level, a very high standard is required. Awards might be recommended for those who are evident leaders in a clinical or scientific field, including those with special skills, those who contribute new ideas of proven worth, those who are generally accepted as leaders of their profession in their region and the country as a whole and those with a national or international reputation.

Eligibility for Awards

The full criteria for eligibility are set out in the ACDA Annual Report, but it should be noted that:

practitioners must hold a medical or dental qualification, be fully registered and be employed as a consultant by a Health Authority or Health Board, a Special Health Authority or an NHS Trust

consultants in NHS Trusts will continue to be eligible for distinction awards whether they remain subject to nationally determined terms and conditions of service or to terms agreed between them and the individual Trust

locum consultants are not eligible.

Age limits

Age limits for new awards were introduced with effect from the 1990 Awards round. They are currently 60 for C awards and 62 for higher awards (B, A and A+). Practitioners who reach age 60 during the awards round will remain eligible for consideration for C awards and those who reach age 62 during that period will remain eligible for higher awards.

How the system works

There are three routes that funnel Distinction Award recommendations into the decision-making system:

- (a) recommendations from the Regional C and Higher Awards Committees (see below). This encompasses all specialities represented in the Region
- (b) recommendations through the Medical Royal Colleges
- (c) recommendations made directly to the ACDA Chairman or the Chairman of the relevant Regional Awards Committee or Higher Awards Committee or in Scotland, to the Scottish ACDA Secretariat on behalf of self or colleague.

Chairman of the ACDA	Sir William Doughty
Medical Director of the ACDA	Sir Christopher Paine
Chairman of the Scottish Sub-Committee	Professor L. G. Whitby

Structure in England and Wales

"Region" refers to Wales and the boundaries of the 14 Regional Health Authorities in England as at 31 March 1994.

Higher Awards Committees

Each Region has a Higher Awards Committee (HAC) responsible for drawing up nominations for A and B awards for submission to the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards.

Membership of this Higher Awards Committee is determined by the Chairman of the ACDA.

Regional C Awards Committees

There is a Regional C Awards Committee (RAC) in each Region, responsible for drawing up nominations for C awards for submission to the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards. The Committee is chaired by the RHA Chairman, who is supported by a clinical vice-chairman. In Wales, the Committee is chaired by the Director of the National Health Service in Wales.

These Committees are balanced in terms of speciality and geography and include three District General Managers or Trust Chief Executives. The Regional General Managers and the Regional Director of Public Health are also members of the Regional C Awards Committee.

These Regional Committees channel recommendations to the central body.

Review of Awards

All new or increased awards allocated from the 1989 awards round onwards are subject to review to ensure that the award is still merited. The review is undertaken during the fourth year of receipt of an award, so that any decision to downgrade or withdraw an award will be effective five years from the date on which the award was first paid. C, B and A awards will be reviewed by the appropriate Regional or Higher Awards Committee, in Scotland by the appropriate Regional meetings, and A+ awards will be reviewed by the ACDA.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists' system

England and Wales

The President appoints a senior psychiatrist in each Region to become the College's Regional Adviser for Distinction Awards. Each Adviser calls an annual meeting to which all existing Merit Award holders in the speciality are invited. Existing Merit Award holders are able to advise the Chairman on recommendations for their own grade of merit (C award holders, for example, can advise on non-award holders put forward for the C award), but do not do so for higher awards and are not present at these discussions.

The College's Regional Adviser for Distinction Awards has a list of all current psychiatrists in the Region, their age, employment and date of retirement. This is the basic working list on which decisions are based. Inaccuracies in these lists occur, particularly in the case of new appointments, or where there are split appointments between Regions.

The President calls an annual meeting, divided into A, B and C awards sections at which Honorary Officers of the College, Regional Advisers for Distinction Awards, Chairmen of Divisions and Specialist Sections meet to prepare the College recommendations.

Participants at this meeting are circulated with lists of all consultant psychiatrists in England and Wales divided by speciality. At the meeting, the President reads out each name giving an opportunity for those present to identify candidates for awards.

There is a quota of Merit Awards in each grade (A, B, C) and the purpose of the meeting is to consider all consultant psychiatrists and prioritise the recommendations so that the appropriate number of recommendations is put forward. These recommendations then go forward to the Chairman of the ACDA, together with the citation forms which have been prepared in advance of the meeting. They are then considered with recommendations from the two other routes.

Action by Members

Members of the College, who are eligible for an award, should:

- (a) check that their name is on the Regional list and that the information is correct. The employer will have been notified automatically and a copy of the Nominal Rolls is sent to each trust
- (b) send a copy of their curriculum vitae to the College's Regional Adviser for Distinction Awards (see list below) on an annual basis
- (c) prepare a curriculum vitae for the Regional Advisory Committee when requested. The relevant forms are available from this Committee
- (d) supply a curriculum vitae to the Chairman of their College Section.

Enquiries, including those to the Chairman of the ACDA, should be addressed to the ACDA Secretariat, NHS Management Executive, Room 2N34, Quarry House, Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7UE (telephone: 0532 545 710). There is a separate Secretariat for Scotland based within the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service in Edinburgh. A paper from the Chairman of the Scottish Division follows.

VANESSA CAMERON, *The Secretary, Royal College of Psychiatrists*

Timetable

January	ACDA Chairman writes to Royal Colleges etc for nominations. Nominal roll of practitioners eligible for awards sent to the College.
February	President chairs annual meeting with awards advisers to prepare College recommendations.
April–July	ACDA Chairman and Vice-Chairman visit the Regions to discuss their nominations and those from other sources.
September	Recommendations drawn up for consideration at the annual meeting of the ACDA.
October	Annual meeting of the ACDA which the President attends.

Regional Advisers for Distinction Awards

East Anglia	Professor E. S. Paykel
Mersey	Professor J. Copeland
Northern	Professor D. Eccleston
Northern Ireland	Dr. D. King
North East Thames	Professor A. Wakeling
North West Thames	Professor R. G. Priest
North Western	Dr. D. Jolley
Oxford	Dr. D. Julier
South East Thames	Professor J. P. Watson
South West Thames	Professor A. H. Ghodse
South Western	Dr. A. C. Brown
Trent	Professor A. R. Nicol
Wales	Professor W. I. Fraser
Wessex	Dr. M. A. Rowton-Lee
West Midlands	Professor R. Bluglass
Yorkshire	Professor R. H. S. Mindham